

Media Release: April 2007

Dive into Earth Day and sign the Reef Check Declaration of Reef Rights

22 April 2007

The Reef Check Foundation is calling on the people of North Queensland to pledge their support for its **International Declaration of Reef Rights on International Earth Day, 22 April 2007**. The Declaration aims to promote action to save the world's coral reefs including the iconic Great Barrier Reef. A goal of **one million signatures** has been set, and the Declaration will be presented to the Heads of State to all 101 countries with coral reefs during the **International Year of the Reef, 2008**.

Data collected over the past ten years by Reef Check, **the world's largest coral reef monitoring organization**, shows that over-fishing, global climate change, pollution and sedimentation continue to damage the health of coral reefs worldwide. Although Australia's coral reefs are some of the best protected in the world, they are not immune to these threats. The Declaration asks people to pledge to ask if their seafood is sustainably caught, use products that will not pollute the sea, reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, not cause damage or disturbance to the reef when visiting, support environmentally friendly development and encourage their friends to also sign the Declaration.

In July 2004, the **Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority (GBRMPA)** took steps to further protect significant areas of the GBRMP by increasing the area of the Marine Park which is in green 'no take' zones. Following concerns from the local community that **poaching has been occurring** within protected marine zones and in line with the messages outlined in the Declaration, **Reef Check Australia** are coordinating a **fishing debris clean up** from Orpheus and Pelorus Islands beginning on the weekend of 22 April - **Dive into Earth Day**.

Local volunteers will restore the site by reporting on and removing fishing line, nets and other assorted debris from reefs around the islands to improve the local environment. This part of the project will be completed in alliance with GBRMPA, James Cook University Dive Club and **with the support (in part) by funds from the PADI Project AWARE Foundation** to the sum of \$1200.

The cleared site will become a **baseline for regular Reef Check monitoring** of coral reef health, fish size and abundance, and also the incidence of new fishing debris, which may be an indication of 'poaching' within new GBRMPA 'green' zones.

The findings of this project will be communicated to the wider community, and used by GBRMPA and Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service to review and perhaps make changes to their current marine management practices.

People can view and pledge support to the International Declaration of Reef Rights by visiting www.reefcheck.org/petition/petition.php.

For further press information and images please contact Lauren Bird or Roger Beeden at Reef Check Australia via email, media@reefcheckaustralia.org, or telephone, (07) 4724 3950.

Reef Check

Reef Check is a volunteer, non-profit organization set up by coral researchers following a meeting in 1996 where the global coral reef crisis was first discussed. Reef Check has been

collecting data since the first International Year of the Reef in 1997 and is now active in over 82 countries and territories world wide.

It is Reef Check's global mission: www.reefcheck.org.

- to educate the public and governments about the value of coral reefs and rocky reef ecosystems and the crisis facing them;
- create a global network of volunteer teams, trained and led by scientists, that regularly monitor and report on reef health using a standard method;
- facilitate collaborative use of reef health information by community groups, governments, universities and businesses to design and implement ecologically sound and economically sustainable solutions;
- stimulate local action to protect remaining pristine reefs and rehabilitate damaged reefs worldwide especially through the creation of Marine Protected Areas.

Reef Check Australia is based in Townsville and coordinates Reef Check activities within Australia including the flagship Great Barrier Reef project and local Townsville project. www.reefcheckaustralia.org.